

VOLUNTEER

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"It's fantastic," Daytona Beverages Chief Operating Officer Chris Bowler said as he watched nearly all of his 130 employees happily scooping the ingredients for lentil casserole.

"My father has a saying: 'To whom much is given, much is expected.' This is a cool way of giving back."

The food will go to the financially strapped families who attend Food Brings Hope's literacy classes in Pierson three days each week. "We are extremely appreciative," said Food Brings Hope founder Forough Hosseini. "It makes such a huge difference. We will make sure every grain is used wisely."

The hundreds of adults learning English and kids getting tutoring attend the classes from 4 to 7 p.m., so Food Brings

Hope gives them dinner while they're there. To help reinforce their lessons, the families are required to speak English while they eat, Hosseini said. The two-year-old program has exploded from 16 families to 60, and recently had to move from Pierson Elementary School to San Jose Mission of St. Peter's Church in Pierson, Hosseini said.

Food Brings Hope, founded in 2007, is a nonprofit organization that helps families with children who experience hunger due to homelessness, poverty or unfamiliarity with community resources.

Bowler said he and his father, Daytona Beverages President Kevin Bowler, make giving part of the culture of the 70-year-old company they bought in 1995.

They also hold an annual golf tournament that has raised more than \$1.25 million over the years for the local Boys

and Girls Club.

"I personally think the most important thing you can do as a company is give back," Chris Bowler said.

Daytona Beverages, which distributes 4.5 million cases of a wide range of beers annually, normally only shuts down two days per year: Christmas and New Year's Day.

Tuesday was a rare exception, and the company loaded up customers last week in anticipation of the one-day shutdown, said Vice President of On Premise Sales Rene Kennedy.

"We take care of 850 bars and restaurants in Volusia and Flagler counties," Kennedy said. Kennedy said he was glad to put in some extra hustle last week to make Tuesday's company shutdown possible.

"I've never worked for a group of guys who love to give back to their community," said Kennedy,

who's been with the company for 33 years. "This was an awesome experience for the employees."

The employees received their regular pay Tuesday, but "every one of these people would have done it for free," Kennedy said. He said the Bowlers aren't worried about what they lost in productivity and profits.

"This will probably be a tradition every year," Kennedy said. "We'll probably find other organizations to help."

The organization Feeding Children Everywhere sent five of its Orlando-based employees to Daytona Beverages Tuesday to train everyone the proper way to pack the nutritious 220-calorie meals.

"We do 700 events like this per year," said Feeding Children Everywhere employee Daniela Farinas. "Chick-fil-A did one million meals in 45 minutes with 5,378 employees."

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The Daytona employees worked quickly, but they labored with a smile and took a few breaks for things like a Macarena dance contest.

Daytona Beverages driver Cedric Lawson was enjoying the break from lifting the 700 cases of beer he usually moves around every day. On Tuesday, he just had to lift tiny scoops full of rice.

"I did an excellent job," the 33-year-old joked. "I did some bagging, too. I had a ball. You know it's for a good cause. It makes me a proud employee of Daytona Beverages."

When the packing was done, employees were

treated to a feast of free food themselves. There was corn on the cob, potato salad, watermelon and steaks.

Mike Mitchener, the manager of the Sam's Club on Beville Road, got on the business end of a large grill and cooked up steaks from his store that Chris Bowler bought for all the employees.

"We're a big supporter of Food Brings Hope," said Mitchener, who noted he's been involved with the organization for about five years.

"The fact they're taking it upon themselves to feed people, that's a big deal."